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ABSTRACT

Lewis-Clark State College, a small college in Lewiston, Idaho, establishes close cooperation with rural schools through specialized teacher preparation, community outreach, and willingness to bring educational ideas and expertise to rural areas. The teacher preparation program stresses development of professional versatility through composite majors, special education endorsement, elementary-secondary endorsement, and participation in cocurricular activities. The college works with districts to qualify inservice training activities for college credit, and offers compressed format courses. Graduate endorsement from neighboring graduate institutions, summer institutes addressing specific situations, and counseling for instructional aides who wish to pursue certification are other aspects of college involvement. The college serves as a clearinghouse for legislative data and action, offers early start/enhancement and specialized degree programs in several rural schools, encourages citizen involvement in education through annual conferences, and helps small schools identify alternative funding sources and prepare proposals. A summer enrichment program for elementary and junior high school students, and an annual International Conference which brings together teachers, elementary-secondary students, and foreign guests are examples of direct college involvement with rural students. Cooperative efforts initiated by the college among rural schools include library and media resource networks and gifted and handicapped programs. Principles which have promoted success are briefly described. (LFL)

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RURAL SCHOOL/SMALL COLLEGE COLLABORATION

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Rural School/Small College Collaboration

We promote an interactive soul mate relationship with small schools and rural communities in our mostly rural state. When we compare ourselves with larger and/or urban institutions of higher education, we easily feel empathy for the rural school as it compares itself to the urban school. In our culture, where large urban social institutions generate norms and demands for change, small rural institutions must respond to them effectively or face obsolesence, loss of patron support, and the realization that their charges are less than adequately prepared for encountering the challenges of their futures.

We recognize that we have a restricted range of opportunities, fewer resources and less flexibility in using them than do larger institutions. We know that our colleagues in small school systems face the same reality. This recognition is accompanied by a realization that our constituencies and the larger society do not lower their expectations of us even though they are aware of our comparative disadvantages. While all human services fields face increasing demands for performance, and receive proportionately fewer resources than was the case a decade or two ago, responding to them is proportionately more difficult for smaller schools.

For example, when a state increases graduation requirements for high schools, larger systems may be able to respond by increasing class sizes or adding sections in courses they have previously offered as electives. Small schools often must recruit new faculty or recredential

existing faculty to meet standards required by the change and add offerings to their curricula which were not there before. If they recruit a specialist, say a chemistry teacher, to meet the increased demands, they must find one who can teach other things because they may only need one section of chemistry per year. If they have ready access to an urban area, a part time person might be available, but that opportunity is not frequently present in rural schools.

This paper will illustrate ways in which we have pursued our soul mate relationship with small schools in the areas of assuring a well-prepared teacher force, responding to increased demands and changes in standards, and increasing opportunities available through those schools. We will mention several models which we feel hold promise in these three areas, but which have not been implemented largely because of lack of resources or lack of resource flexibility. Finally, factors which have promoted our success in dealing with small schools will be cited.

The Teacher Force

Most of our education students come from rural communities and small schools. They are familiar with rural lifestyles and often prefer them. They plan to teach in schools such as those from which they graduate. In our advising process, we stress the development of professional versatility in their program planning. We stress composite majors in natural science and social science which qualify them for

endorsements in several disciplines. We urge elementary and secondary majors to add the special education endorsement program in their respective courses of study. For elementary majors who enjoy a particular discipline (say math or physics) that is needed in rural schools, but demand doesn't usually justify a full time position, we recommend that they add the content area as a secondary endorsement (academic minor). We promote active membership and participation in professional organizations as part of students' programs and preparation for their continued professional development. In their co-curricular pursuits, we recommend their participation in coaching activities, drama, music, art, etc. which are needed if rural schools are to present a comprehensive set of educational opportunities for their students.

In our program evaluation model, the efficacy of this approach has been confirmed by graduates and by those who have hired them. In follow-up activities with rural school personnel, we inquire about demands they face relative to their teaching forces and sensitize advising, students, and program content to those demands. We are convinced that these measures increase the employability of our graduates and we know that our efforts are noticed and appreciated by rural districts.

For inservice teachers, we promote continued professional development in a number of ways. First, we replicate our annual special education conference in two sites to give teachers greater access. Second, we work with districts to expand the scope of their "normal" curriculum development activities so that they qualify as credit bearing

experiences in which teachers may enroll for minimal cost with minimal inconvenience. Third, we offer courses in compressed format (e.g., Comptuer Applications in Education) which enables inservice teachers to expand their skills without sacrificing much of their well-earned summer vacation and minimizing the cost of access to advanced education.

Fourth, for teachers who are involved in graduate programs, we attempt to attain graduate endorsement from our sister graduate institutions for special topics courses (e.g., A recent series of one credit courses in Direct Instruction Techniques was endorsed by the University of Idaho, Utah State University and University of Oregon.). Fifth, when mathematics graduation requirements were recently increased, we moved quickly to assess small school capabilities to meet the demand with certified teachers. Together we planned a summer institute which was specifically designed to provide necessary capabilities in the shortest amount of time. Sixth, we worked with special education consultants in rural north Idaho to gain endorsements for certified personnel and to give professional development opportunities to special education aides (some eventually becoming certified teachers). The close working relationship which developed between our faculty and the adjunct faculty has been mutually rewarding.

Further, districts who observed the success of this project have identified a new source of professionals in their schools--the instructional aide. We actively work with districts to involve their aides in correspondence study, college-based inservice, directed studies and later campus-based courses which results in emergence of certified

teachers from their aide corps.

Each of these measures requires what might be deemed to be "extra effort" on our part. We recognize that we can accomplish the goals of providing the level of relevant professional preparation and access to that preparation for personnel in small schools by a) actively seeking their input, b) adopting their frames of reference when attempting to understand the demands they face, c) being willing to approach and earnestly establish intermediary relationships between other higher education institutions and small schools, and d) being willing to adapt our "regular" operations to meet their needs while exercising collaborative responsibility for quality control, rather than insisting that they access our regular program in traditional fashion.

In fact, our faculty do assume additional responsibilities in these operations, but that is sometimes required to meet our institutional goals in the existing socio-political environment. The collaborating districts recognize that we will and do go the extra mile, which increases the "soul mate quotient" of our relationship and results in their support for our goals even when they do not directly benefit.

Responding to Increased Demands and Standards Changes

The Idaho Commission on Excellence recommended significantly increased graduation requirements for Idaho schools. The State Board of Education enthusiastically endorsed those standards. The legislature saluted the Commission, the State Board, and itself for vastly improving

the quality of public education in Idaho magically and almost overnight. Teachers, superintendents, principals, parents, school board members, and students welcomed the increased standards and testified to all three bodies about the meaning the proposed changes held for the reality of daily operations in their schools. The constituted bodies listened to the commentaries with patience and welcomed them enthusiastically. As preparation of the state budget progressed, however, it became obvious that the testimony concerning the meaning of the changes in the reality of daily operations had not been heard.

With the cooperation of several school districts and professional organizations, our College prepared an analysis format which could be used by any district to document the policy, fiscal, scheduling, support resource, library, transportation, co-curricula, and community support impact of the mandated changes upon their daily operations. After a conference, which examined the changes and the analysis format in detail, local districts applied the analysis format in their home communities. The College collected the completed documents from the districts and summarized them. This summary document and those prepared by individual districts were given to key members of the Commission, State Board, and Legislature, respectively.

Evidence from these sources emerged in the later work of the legislature and executive branches. The reality context in which data was presented clearly showed the challenges the schools would face in implementing the new standards. It gave decision makers pictures of impact from student, teacher, administrator, and school board member

perspectives. The image of policy changes in terms of their operational effects, in addition to their gross statewide costs, resulted in a number of fiscal and regulation changes which substantially improved the ratio of positive to negative effects of implementing the new standards. In fact, the changes realized made implementation of the standards plausible instead of impossible according to feedback from several superintendents. The schools did not realize the full appropriation needed to implement the changes, but they did not face a totally impossible task due in part to this collaborative intervention.

Early in the current presidential administration, measures were taken which reduced eligibility of veterans and social security survivors (children) for educational benefits. Students who had previously been eligible for benefits would not be if they weren't enrolled for six college credits by May 15 of that year. For survivors who had not graduated from high school, this would have meant substantially increased personal expenditures for college. Our Continuing Education division moved quickly to establish courses at several rural schools under our early start/enhancement program so that eligible students could meet the enrollment requirements. Local school personnel recruited parents and other citizens to take the classes as well so that the College would not face a financial loss as our continuing education operations are self supporting.

Perhaps the greatest benefits in this experience were realized in the classes. Parents, aunts, uncles, neighbors and high school juniors and seniors were students together. They were able to share an

experience as intellectual peers which none of them had had before. They saw each other in new roles and with new perspectives. Friendly competition, admiration, support, and intellectual sharing all occurred, which made those classes among the most talked about on or off campus. Classes of that mix continued for two semesters after the original high school seniors had graduated. In the case of the College, responding to one set of student needs, which had emerged due to altered standards, resulted in rewarding experiences for several sets of students.

From time to time, schools need increased citizen involvement and support in their pursuits. For several years, the Education Division focused its annual conference upon promoting citizen involvement. Those conferences produced consultation with small school districts and citizens groups on a series of topics including override levy elections, economic development, responding to accreditation issues, creating parent advisory groups required in special programs, and home-school relations during massive layoffs. While the conferences often engendered controversy about appropriate levels and types of community involvement advocated for ongoing operations, and drew criticism from some school district personnel for those characteristics, they established the College as a source of expertise and willing assistance.

When we responded to needs which later emerged, the controversy and criticism were quickly forgotten. Our relations with small schools in the area of citizen involvement caused one superintendent to testify to the legislature that "Lewis-Clark State College calls me to ask what they can do to help my district, (other schools) call me to explain how

my district can help them." The mutuality which results from our efforts to assist small schools also means that they contact us when they think we need their assistance.

Small schools often generate innovative program ideas and seek external funding for them. The College has been successful in two major ways in collaborating with such efforts. First, we have the reference capabilities needed to a) identify alternative funding sources, b) establish contact with them, c) examine their respective criteria for funding, and d) establish initial estimates of success probabilities for districts so they can judge whether to write to one criteria or another which appears more promising. Second, after locating a likely source, some districts need assistance to prepare part or all of the proposal. Our faculty has been especially responsive to requests for such assistance from schools. As a result, when we seek cooperation, endorsements and participation from districts in attempts to obtain outside funding for our projects, it is usually forthcoming.

Increasing Opportunities

We actively recruit high school students into early start/enhancement programs where our courses become part of their high school programs and apply toward college degrees after graduation. While this may result in students choosing to attend our College, it always gives them opportunities to experience instruction which they would not have otherwise.

We have developed a specialized degree program which has been very well received in rural communities. It recognizes credit for experience, requires completion of the general education core, and a set of professional level management courses. Access to this degree enables a) rural businesses to hire more skilled employees, b) people who have delayed their education to continue it, c) employers to access relevant training for their employees and d) increased levels of visibility for education in the community.

Those who complete this program usually become community leaders, in some sense. As they progress in their own programs, they become stronger, more active advocates for increased educational opportunity for others. They continue as stauch supporters for expanded educational opportunity for all members of the community after receiving their degrees. They represent a valuable addition to community structure and take leadership in advocating increased resource allocation to education at all levels. Through this program, we realize a role as active agents in community development, which results in increased community support for schools.

Each summer we operate Kids Kollege, which is designed as an enrichment program for elementary and junior high school students. A full range of offerings including computer courses, drama, art, karate, nutrition, dance, etc. is provided for students. During the past two summers, students from rural areas have come to Lewiston to stay with friends or relatives while attending Kids Kollege. These students can pursue a variety of interests which often continues in their home

schools (i.e., science projects) or in career explorations of a meaningful nature.

Several years ago we invited students in grades 2-8 from an entire school system to the campus for a day. We had arranged schedules of classes taught by faculty, volunteers and education majors. Students were able to select some classes to attend and were assigned to others. They experienced a variety of classes including astronomy, a simulation in blindness, animals of South America, intensive learning experiences about several countries, participation in a psychology experiment, cartooning, optical illusions, video production, computer graphics, linguistic analysis, and principles of robotics. When we visit student teachers in that district, students still stop our faculty members to remind them of "that day at the College" and how much they would like to do it again. Their teachers, who received a special day of inservice which they had co-designed with our faculty, jokingly (we think) remark that they want to go with their students when we repeat the experience. By commiting our resources to a small school district for one day, everyone was able to have a very meaningful educational experience which has obviously had continued impact.

Each year we have an International Conference on the campus. It focuses upon a specific country (e.g., The Peoples Republic of China) or a specific topic (Agricultural Trade, Pacific Rim Trade Networks). We make a special effort to offer teachers an inservice experience concerning the topic each year. Further, we invite students from rural districts to attend the sessions as they are able. We sometimes provide

a set of parallel activities for junior high and upper elementary students, and we take our international guests to rural schools. Students in communities like Craigmont and Kendrick, Idaho, have had face to face contact with officials of the Peoples Republic of China, the U.S.S.R., Republic of Indonesia, Republic of Korea, and Japan as a result. Those officials have also had the opportunity to visit rural America--something they have not done even though they may have been in this country for as long as ten years.

When we gain access to unique resources for ourselves, we do our best to share them with rural districts, and to have our guests gain the unique perspectives offered by citizens of rural America. Everyone involved, including the College, experiences gains from that sharing.

We have attempted to establish three major cooperative efforts with and among rural schools which require levels of resources which have eluded us to date. First, we have attempted to establish library and media resource networks to serve small schools. This is an area where they face a continuing challenge that is increasing in its urgency with every passing day of the information age. Secondly, we have proposed mobile science labs which move from district to district to provide the environment required for quality instruction in chemistry, physics, earth science, and advanced biological science. Few small districts can afford to outfit and maintain science laboratory capabilities they really need. Cooperatively, they would be able to maintain the capability if the funds to acquire them could be obtained. Thirdly, we have attempted to establish collaborative efforts to serve special students (handicapped

and gifted) in rural districts. A consultive capability for diagnosis and program development for special education and honors or quest programs for gifted students is needed. Single small districts cannot always afford the capabilities they need for these special students. Many have stretched their resources to the snapping point just to deliver the mandated course of study required for graduation.

Principles Which Promote Success

From these examples, the principles appear to be obvious and fairly simple. Those which have proven to be most productive for us are listed below. As the examples used have illustrated, identifying principles is only a first step. Building productive relationships requires that the College behave congruently with them. That is a very real challenge.

* To develop sustained relationships with schools, you must seek them out.
* Their needs must be perceived and understood from their perspectives.
* They must be actively listened to and heard.
* They must receive something which they think they need from the relationship.
* You must be willing and able to share the best of your resources with them even if sharing slightly limits your own access.
* It is more productive to respond to the needs to which they assign high priority before responding to needs which you perceive to be of highest priority.
* The interactive style and process must be characterized by collegiality and collaboration rather than an expert to novice perspective.
* Realize that they expect to solve their own problems in their ways and don't resent them for doing so.

* Be more interested in their meeting their self-expectations rather than your expectations of them.

* If they fail to take advantage of the fantastic opportunities you offer them, don't be disappointed. Quid pro quo relationships are unusual for schools; almost all their constituencies have historically expected to receive more than they have given and the opportunity for a truly collaborative relationship is suspect because of that history.

* Be proactive in nurturing the collaborative relationship. Once it is functioning, the benefits to be attained for everyone are more than worth the effort.

* Make your ongoing program and operations responsive to the challenge small schools face in the future. If collaboration always occurs on a special topics basis and your ongoing operations do not attend to the demands faced by your soul mates, your efforts will appear to be to be responsive tokenism. Expect what you are and what small schools are to be changed by your relationship. To expect and to realize otherwise is to invite failure.